FBI Check on Newsman Called Unintended

Schorr Probe Overdone?

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Former White House aide Lawrence Higby ordered the FBI to compile a background report on CBS-TV newsman Daniel Schorr in August 1971, according to testimony released by the House Judiciary Committee yesterday.

But the testimony indicated the FBI went beyond a background check—a simple sifting of its files—and began a full field investigation, which includes interviews of an individual's business associates, friends and sometimes family.

In an interview with the Judiciary Committee staff, Higby said he ordered a "complete background" on Schorr. He discovered a few days later that the FBI had launched a full investigation of "the poor guy," he said.

When the investigation became publicly known, administration officials said Schorr was being considered for a government job—a claim that aroused widespread doubts because Schorr was a critic of the administration.

After Schorr demanded to know why he was being investigated, Higby canceled the order for an investigation, according to documents released yesterday. He never did find out whether Schorr was being considered for a job, he told the committee staff.

Schorr himself released a sheaf of documents yesterday to conicide with publication of the House committee's report. Obtained under the Freedom of Information Act, the internal administration and FBI memos indicate that such "background checks" of newspersons were routine practice when H. R. (Bob) Haldeman was White House chief of staff before resigning in the aftermath of Watergate.

One FBI memo, which lays blame for the mixup on the White House rather than the FBI as Higby did, says that someone there "got their signals mixed" and that "all they wanted was background information . . . similar to that which has previously been requested by Haldeman's office on other news personalities."

Schorr's file also contains a Nov. 10, 1971 memo from the late FBI director J. Edgar Hoover to other FBI officials that contains a reference to Ken W. Clawson, then a reporter who had broken the Schorr investigation story for The Washington Post and now the administration's communications director.

The memo says Haldeman pressed Hoover to deny Clawson's claim that the bureau had confirmed the FBI's role in the investigation.

Hoover told his fellow FBI men he had responded by saying he doubted Clawson really had such confirmation because orders "are to not give Clawson the time of day."

Haldeman than asked the director to "be sure we did not supply Clawson or any of the rest of the press with anything," the memo says.

Schorr said yesterday that he obtained the FBI files because Attorney General William Saxbe ruled that the material should be made available as "a matter of administrative discretion." Schorr's request was originally denied by FBI director Clarence Kelley.